

Chapter Nine

Political Parties

Political Parties

- A party is a group that seeks to elect candidates to public office by supplying them with a label (party identification), by which they are known to the electorate
- United States parties have become weaker as labels, sets of leaders, and organizations

Parties in the US and Europe

- European parties are disciplined gatekeepers, to which voters are very loyal, though this has been declining recently
- The federal system decentralizes power in U.S.
- Parties are closely regulated by state and federal laws, which weaken them
- Candidates are now chosen through primaries, not by party leaders

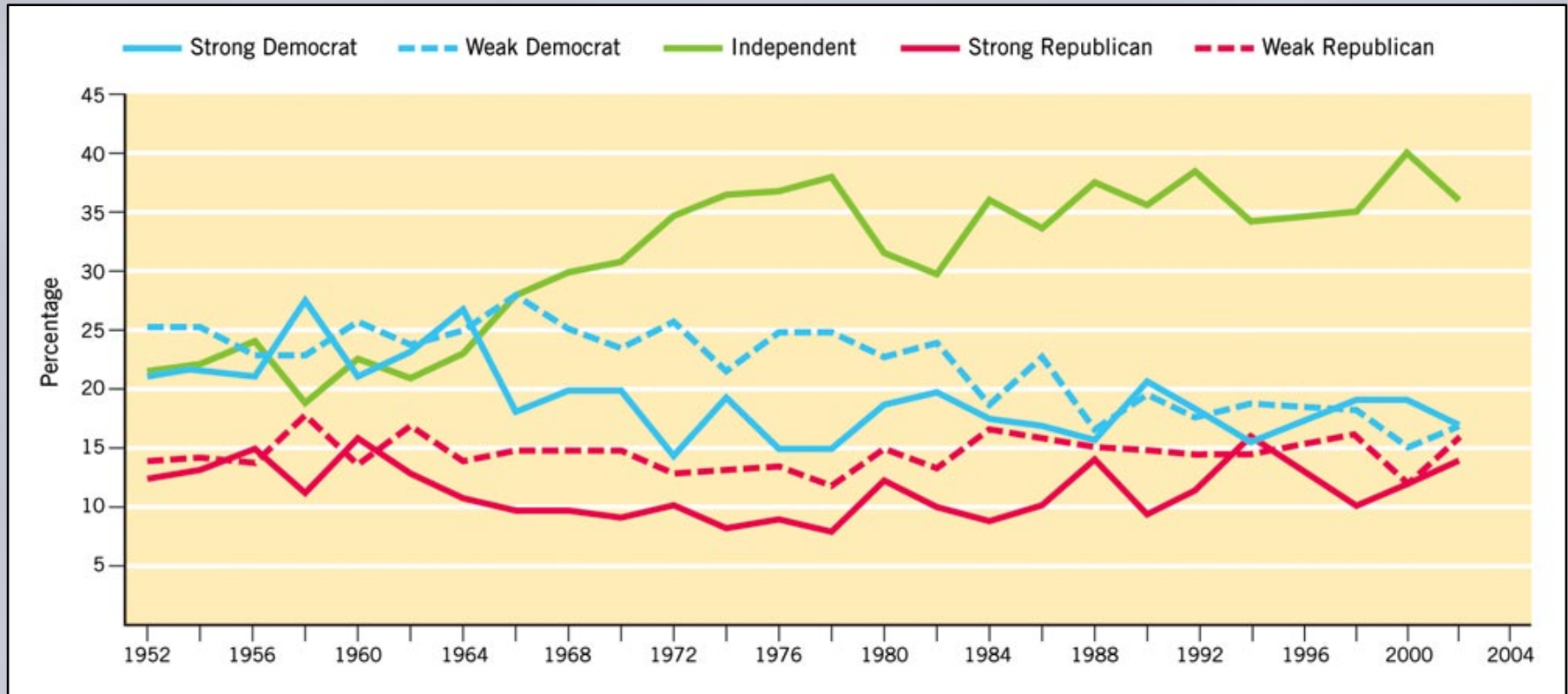
The Rise and Decline of Parties

- The founders disliked parties, viewing them as factions
- During the Jacksonian era political participation became a mass phenomenon
- From the Civil War until the 1930s most states were dominated by one party
- Progressives pushed measures to curtail parties' power and influence

The Results of Reform

- The worst forms of political corruption were reduced
- All political parties were weakened; parties became less able to hold officeholders accountable or to coordinate across the branches of government

Figure 9.1: Decline in Party Identification, 1952-2002



National Election Studies, *The NES Guide to Public Opinion and Electoral Behavior*, 1952-2000, table 20.1, and data for 2002 updated by Marc Siegal.

Party Realignment

- **Critical or realigning periods:** periods when a sharp, lasting shift occurs in the popular coalition supporting one or both parties
- Two kinds of realignments
 - A major party is defeated so badly that it disappears and a new party emerges
 - Two existing parties continue but voters shift their loyalty from one to another

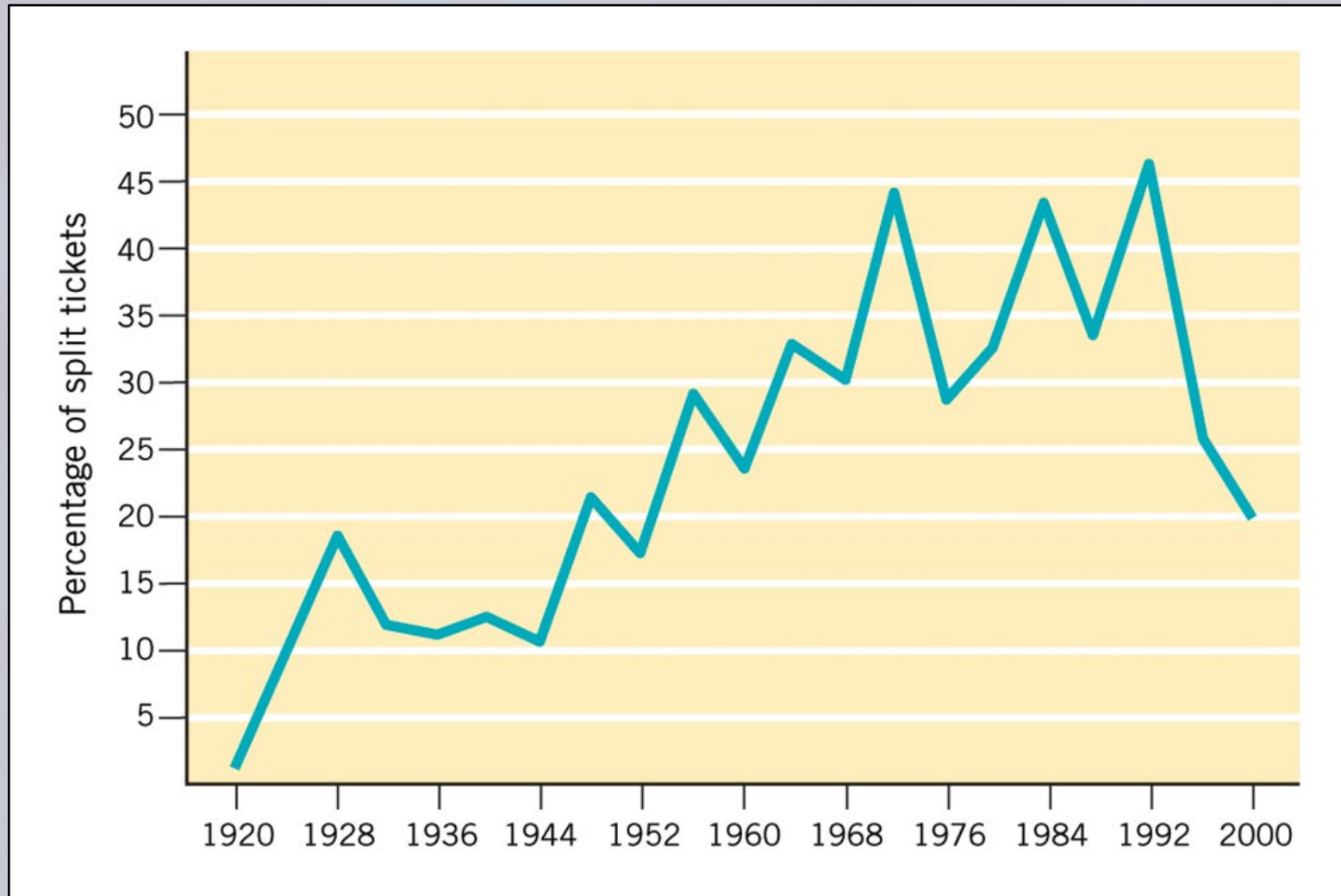
Realignments

- 1860: slavery issue fixed new loyalties in the popular mind
- 1896: economic issues shifted loyalties to East/West, city/farm split
- 1932: economic depression triggered new coalition for Democrats
- 1980: Could not have been a traditional realignment, because Congress was left in the hands of the Democrats

Party Decline

- Evidence that parties are declining, not realigning
- Proportion of people identifying with a party declined between 1960 and 1980
- Proportion of those voting a split ticket increased

Figure 9.2: Trends in Split-Ticket Voting For President and Congress, 1920-2000



Party Structure

- Parties are similar on paper
- RNC effectively created a national firm of political consultants
- Democrats moved to factionalized structure and redistributed power
- By the 1990s, DNC had learned from the RNC: adopted the same techniques, with some success

Nominating a President

- **Primary:** an election in which voters select the candidate who will run on each party's ticket
- **Caucus:** a meeting of party followers at which delegates are picked

Table 9.1: Who Are the Party Delegates?

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Characteristics of delegates to Democratic and Republican national conventions in 2004.

	Democrats	Republicans
Sex and Race		
Women	50%	43%
Blacks	18	6
Religion		
Protestant	43	65
Catholic	32	—
Jewish	8	—
Education		
College degree and beyond	77	73
Post graduate	53	44
Family Income		
Under \$50,000	15	8
\$100,000 and over	42	44
Belong to union	25	8
Born-again Christian	13	33
Gun owner in household	22	45

Sources: New York Times (August 29, 2004); CBSNEWS.COM, July 24, 2004; Boston Globe, August 31, 2004.

Table 9.5: How Party Delegates and Party Voters Differ in Liberal Ideology

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Liberal Ideology	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000
Democrats					
Delegates	66%	39%	47%	43%	41%
Voters	31	25	28	27	34
Republicans					
Delegates	2	1	1	0	1
Voters	15	12	12	7	8

Sources: For 1984: *Los Angeles Times* (August 19, 1984); for 1988: *New York Times*/CBS News poll, in *New York Times* (August 14, 1988); for 1992: *New York Times* (July 13 and August 17, 1992) and unpublished CBS News poll, "The 1992 Republican Convention Delegates"; for 1996: *New York Times* (August 12 and 26, 1996); for 2000, *New York Times* (August 29, 2004).

National Conventions

- National committee sets time and place; issues a “call” setting the number of delegates for each state and the rules for their selection
- In 1970s, Democrats’ rules were changed to weaken local party leaders and increase the proportions of women and minorities
- In 1988, the number of superdelegates was increased

Kinds of Parties

- **Political machine:** a party organization that recruits members via tangible incentives
- **Ideological party:** principle is more important than winning election
- **Solidary groups:** members are motivated by solidarity incentives

Kinds of Parties

- **Sponsored parties:** created or sustained by another organization
- **Personal following:** requires an appealing personality, an extensive network, name recognition, and money

Reasons for the Two Party System

- Electoral system—winner-take-all and plurality system limit the number of parties
- Opinions of voters—two broad coalitions work, although there may be times of bitter dissent
- State laws have made it very difficult for third parties to get on the ballot

Table 9.4: The Public Rates the Two Parties

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Question

Do you think the Republican party or the Democratic party would do a better job of dealing with each of the following issues and problems?

	Democrats	Republicans
Advantage Republicans		
National defense*	37%	53%
Foreign trade	35	48
Crime	36	43
Campaign finance reform	31	37
Split Between the Parties		
Economic prosperity	44	42
Taxes	43	42
Advantage Democrats		
Poverty*	61	27
Environment	54	31
Health care	51	34
Social Security	46	35

*Question on this item asked as "Which party, the Democrats or the Republicans, do you trust to do a better job on . . . ?"

Source: The Public Perspective (April/May 1998): 13, reporting the results of a survey by the Gallup Organization for CNN/USA Today, October 27–28, 1997, and a survey by ABC News/Washington Post, January 15–19, 1998.

Minor Parties

- **Ideological parties:** comprehensive, radical view; most enduring
- **One-issue parties:** address one concern, avoid others
- **Economic protest parties:** regional, protest economic conditions
- **Factional parties:** from split in a major party, usually over the party's presidential nominee

Impact of Minor Parties

- Conventional wisdom holds that minor parties develop ideas that the major parties adopt
- Factional parties have had probably the greatest influence on public policy